

NEWS RELEASE



***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
San Diego, California***

***United States Attorney
Carol C. Lam***

For Further Information, Contact: Assistant U.S. Attorney Alessandra P. Serano (619) 557-7084

For Immediate Release

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY - May 5, 2006

United States Attorney Carol C. Lam announced that today JOSE ERNESTO BELTRAN-QUINONEZ pled guilty in federal district court in San Diego to providing false information related to an alleged threat of smuggling a nuclear warhead into the United States, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1038(a).

In connection with his guilty plea before United States District Court Judge Barry Ted Moskowitz, Beltran admitted that beginning on January 17, 2005, he made a series of 911 emergency telephone calls to the El Centro office of the California Highway Patrol. Beltran further admitted that in those calls he falsely told authorities that: he had recently smuggled two Iraqi nationals and four Chinese chemists from Mexicali, Mexico to Calexico, California; the Iraqi and Chinese nationals were in the United States awaiting the arrival of a nuclear warhead; the nuclear warhead was to be smuggled into the United States via a tunnel connecting Mexicali and Calexico within four days; the Iraqi nationals were to take possession of the warhead once it arrived in the United States; and the Chinese chemists were to assist with setting the warhead up for possible use in Boston.

Beltran also admitted that in order to further mislead authorities, he left a plastic bag near the United States-Mexico border containing Chinese currency, travel documents and photographs of two individuals. In addition, Beltran admitted that in furtherance of the hoax, he reported to authorities that the bag contained the travel documents for the Chinese chemists and the photographs of other individuals allegedly involved in the scheme. Subsequent investigation, however, revealed that the Chinese individuals identified on the travel documents were actually farmers, not chemists. Moreover, no underground tunnel was ever located in the area the defendant identified to investigators.

Federal law enforcement authorities were subsequently able to identify and locate Beltran in Mexico. He was eventually arrested in Mexico with the assistance of Mexican law enforcement officials. Defendant waived extradition and was escorted to the United States in February 2006 to face federal felony criminal charges.

United States Attorney Carol Lam said, "This inexcusable hoax had real costs, and it distracted us from our vigilant efforts to monitor true threats to the community."

"Due to the reckless actions of Beltran-Quinonez, countless law enforcement man-hours and resources were expended," according to Daniel R. Dzwilewski, Special Agent in Charge, San Diego Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. "The resultant investigative effort was nationwide in scope and needlessly alarmed the public."

Sentencing is scheduled for August 15, 2006, at 9:00 a.m., before United States District Court Judge Barry Ted Moskowitz.

DEFENDANT

JOSE ERNESTO BELTRAN-QUINONEZ

SUMMARY OF CHARGE

Title 18, United States Code, Section 1038(a)(False Information and Hoaxes)

Maximum Penalty: Five years custody and a \$250,000 fine.

PARTICIPATING AGENCIES

Federal Bureau of Investigation

United States Border Patrol

California Highway Patrol